

CARMEN

an opera

by Georges Bizet



*Welcome to my world of
bullfights, dancing,
mischief, and mystery!*

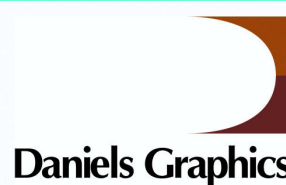
a Tale of a Gypsy

Welcome to Behind the Curtain:

a performance guide created by the internship program of Asheville Lyric Opera.



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Who are the main characters?

Carmen [kar-men]- a mischief causing gypsy who falls in and out of love with men

Don José [zsho-zay]- a soldier who falls in love with Carmen

Escamillo [es-ka-mee-yo] - a confident bullfighter who falls in love with Carmen

Micaëla [mi-ka-ay-la] - an innocent girl from Don José's home town who is in love with Don José



What is the story?

My story takes place in Seville, Spain. I work at a cigarette factory, and a fellow worker fights with me. I am arrested and **Don José**, a guard, plans to take me to prison. I use my wit and charm to convince him to let me go. We fall in love with each other. **Don José** leaves his position as a soldier to come and live with me in the mountains. My friends, a band of smugglers and gypsies, are hiding out there. I grow tired of **Don José** and fall in love with **Escamillo**, a flashy bull fighter. My friends and I read my fortune which predicts that my death is near.

Micaëla, an innocent girl in love with **Don José**, arrives and pleads to **Don José** to return home and see his dying mother. Upon leaving, he reprimands me for falling in love with another man, declaring that I have not seen the last of him. When **Don José** is gone, **Escamillo** takes me to see an amazing bullfight! **Don José** tracks me down and pleads for me to come back to him. I refuse, and in a fit of passion, he stabs me to death.





Who is the opera composer?

Georges Bizet (1838-1875) was a French composer. Bizet (bee-zeh) was the only child of two singing teachers. He was exposed to music at a young age by listening to his father's voice lessons outside the door. At the age of nine, Bizet went to a school for music in Paris called the Conservatoire. He learned how to play piano, organ, sight-read, and compose. He was such a good student that he was considered for the school's highest honor, the Prix de Rome [pree-duh-rome], a contest for composers, but he was eliminated after the first round. Later on, he entered the contest again and won.

After Bizet graduated from the Conservatoire, he left Paris to go on a three year tour of Italy. Bizet really liked the music of both Italy and France, and he was influenced by Rossini, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer and Gounod. This was the only time Bizet left France. He composed operas, symphonies, piano music, and church music. Bizet died during the first run of *Carmen* when it premiered in 1875, at age 36. His death was considered extremely unfortunate because of the timing and the medical conditions that contributed to it: quincy, rheumatism, and two heart attacks. Many audience members were attracted to the performances of *Carmen* because of the tragic nature of Bizet's death.

What kind of opera is *Carmen*?

Carmen is a French opera even though it is set in Spain. Bizet never visited Spain, but there are many sounds and styles of Spanish music within the opera. The characters sing in French, not Spanish.

Carmen is a special kind of opera called an "opéra comique." An opéra comique is an opera that has both singing and spoken dialogue, comic relief, and exciting dances.



What was going on in history during the time of this opera?

- The French Revolution has ended almost 100 years before.
- The Industrial Revolution is in full swing.
- The Paris Opéra presents its first opera.
- The Civil Rights Act is passed in the U.S which guarantees that African Americans have equal rights in public places.



Did you know?



Bullfighting

Bullfighting originated in Spain. In the opera, a bullfighter is called a toreador [tor-eh-ah- dor], but the official term is matador [ma-tah-dor]. The matador marches into the ring wearing a silk jacket, tight trousers, and a special hat. The bull is released into the pen and the matador swings a red cape in front of its face. This action infuriates the giant animal, even though it is colorblind, and it instinctively charges the moving target. The amount of applause is based on how close the bull's horns are to the matador when he waves the cape.



Gypsies

In Spain, there are two groups of gypsies, the *gitanos* [hi-tah-nos] and the *hungaros* [hun-gah-ros]. The *gitanos* mostly live in southern and central Spain and work as entertainers.

The *hungaros* originated from Central Europe and are extremely poor. They are nomadic and sleep in tents or shacks. The *hungaros* walk along the streets and beg people for money. Just like Carmen's friends, they might steal to provide for themselves.